

Sleeping Beauty





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There once lived a king and queen who were finally blessed with a beautiful and healthy baby girl after years of praying for a child. They were overjoyed and held a great feast to celebrate the christening.

All twelve fairies in the kingdom were invited. After the banquet they each gave the child a special present. One at







a time the fairies bent over the cradle and granted the tiny princess gifts such as beauty, wisdom, kindness, and courage.

The eleventh fairy had just completed her wish when, a thirteenth fairy appeared in a swirling, icy wind, with black bats circling around her head. She was old and ugly, and she reeked of evil. The royal couple had forgotten all about her. For many years, the wicked fairy had lived far away, atop a distant mountain where she was never seen by anyone. Many believed that she was dead.

The ugly fairy was furious that she had been snubbed. "I have a gift for your little princess, too," she shrieked, waving her magic wand. "When she is sixteen years old she will prick her finger on a spindle and die."

She cackled and then vanished in another freezing gust of wind. The chill that remained gripped the hearts of the king and queen. They held each other and wept, the joy of the day destroyed.

Then the twelfth fairy

stepped forward. "I am young and not as powerful as the evil one. I cannot undo her curse. But," she said quietly, "I can make it less severe." She held her wand high over the princess and offered: "When the princess pricks her finger she shall not die, but instead she will sleep for one hundred years, until the kiss of a good prince breaks the spell."

The king immediately proclaimed that it would be forbidden for anyone to have a spindle of any kind within his kingdom. Anyone found guilty would be put to death instantly. The heralds of the king announced the message throughout the realm. Spindle burnings were held in town and village squares throughout the countryside. It took some time but, at last, the king was assured that not a single spindle was to be found anywhere in the land. The princess was safe.

As the years passed, the princess grew to have all the qualities the fairies had given her. She was beautiful, kind,





intelligent, and generous. She was loved and admired by everyone. A number of princes had asked for her hand in marriage, but she had refused them all.

In the early spring, on the morning of her sixteenth birthday, her parents took her to an old castle in the country. The journey was long. Then, the king immediately met in private with his advisors, and the queen had to meet with the palace staff. All alone, the princess felt restless. She strolled through the garden, then wandered around the castle. She watched the cooks preparing a meal in the kitchen. She looked at paintings of her ancestors in the main hall. She was still bored.



She thought that perhaps she should have remained at home and played with her ladies in waiting. But it was her sixteenth birthday and she wasn't supposed to be playing games anymore.

She came to a small entryway at the far end of a long hall. A narrow spiral staircase led to the top of the tower.





Brushing aside dust and cobwebs, the princess climbed the steps and found a door slightly ajar. She looked inside.

An old woman was sitting beneath the window, spinning wool. She had lived in the tower for years and had never heard the king's proclamation banning spindles. She greeted the princess with a shy smile.

The princess was no longer bored nor restless. Here was something she had never seen before. "What are you doing?" she asked the old woman.

"I'm spinning wool on my old spindle," the old woman replied.

"Is it fun?"

"It's a job like any other, my child," the old woman sighed.

"Is it difficult?"

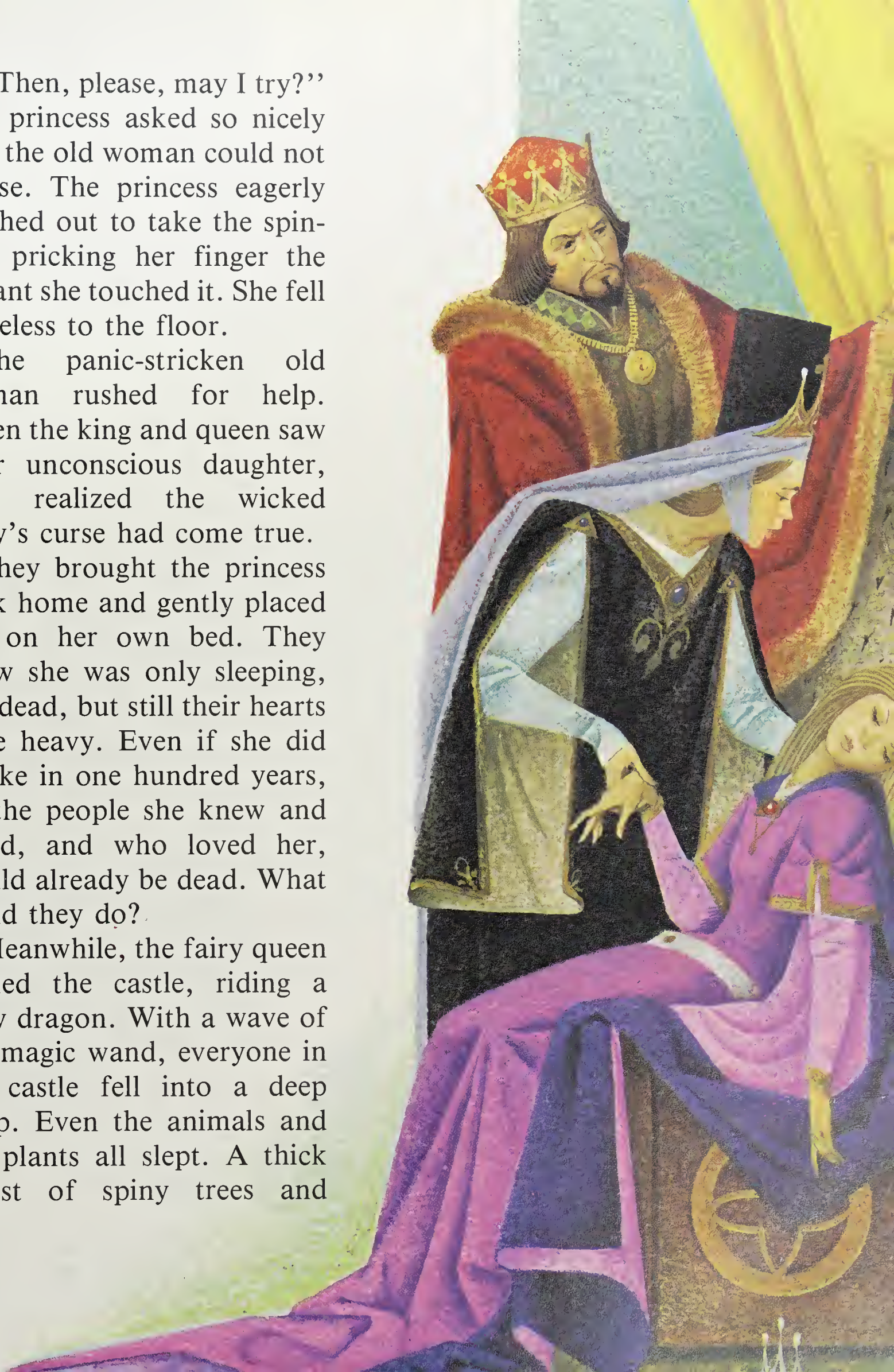
"Oh, no, not at all," the old woman told her. "It's easy to learn."

“Then, please, may I try?”
The princess asked so nicely that the old woman could not refuse. The princess eagerly reached out to take the spindle, pricking her finger the instant she touched it. She fell senseless to the floor.

The panic-stricken old woman rushed for help. When the king and queen saw their unconscious daughter, they realized the wicked fairy’s curse had come true.

They brought the princess back home and gently placed her on her own bed. They knew she was only sleeping, not dead, but still their hearts were heavy. Even if she did awake in one hundred years, all the people she knew and loved, and who loved her, would already be dead. What could they do?

Meanwhile, the fairy queen circled the castle, riding a fiery dragon. With a wave of her magic wand, everyone in the castle fell into a deep sleep. Even the animals and the plants all slept. A thick forest of spiny trees and





thorn bushes sprang up to hide and protect the palace.

While the castle slept, twenty, fifty, ninety years passed, and more. Then one day, a prince who was hunting nearby saw a tower rising above the trees.

“Who lives in that secluded place?” he asked a farmer.

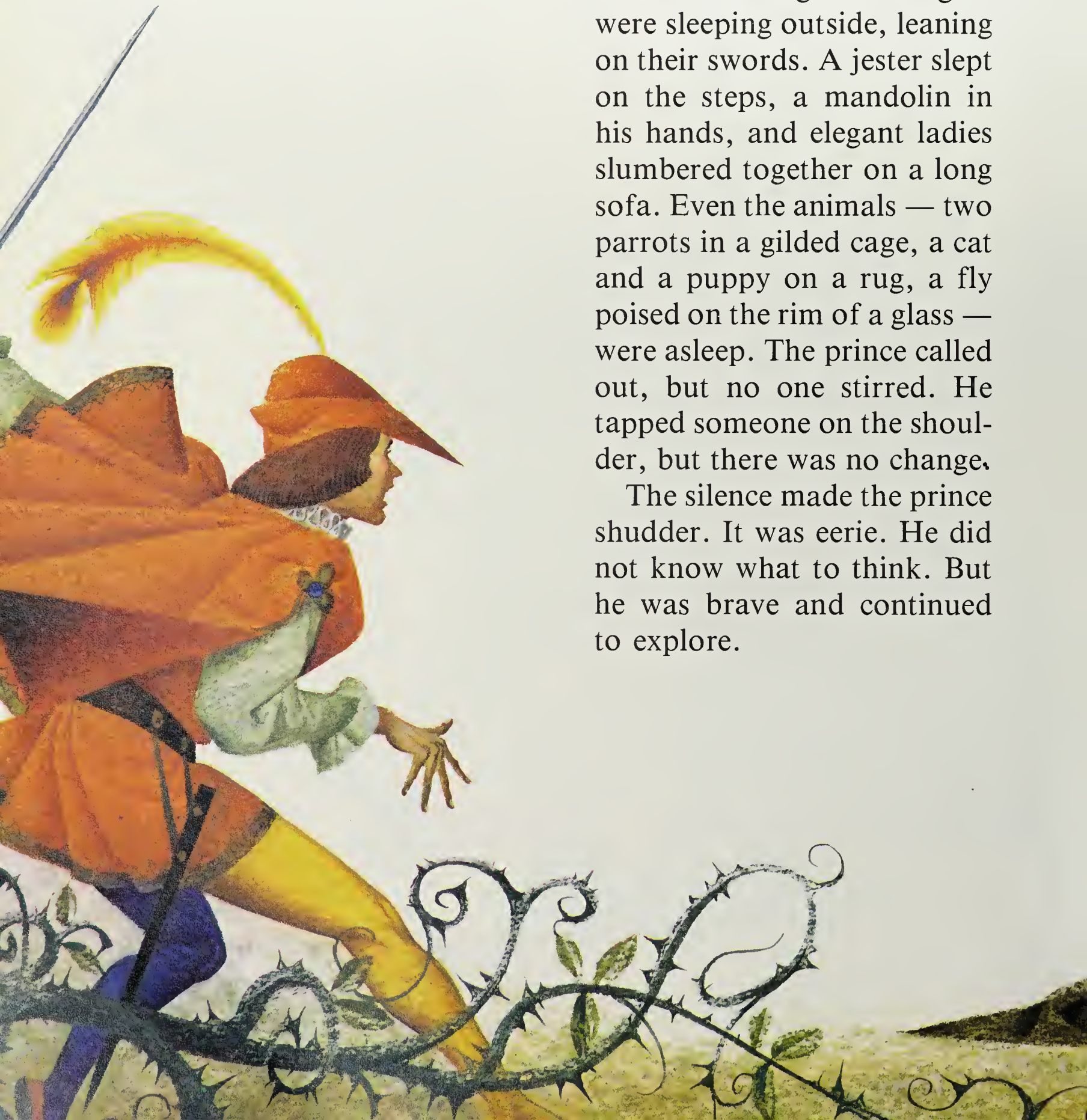
“Some say a dragon or an ogre roams those empty halls,” came the answer, “but others say there is a beautiful princess inside.”



The daring prince felt compelled to solve the mystery. He chopped through tick brambles with his sword for hours. At last a path was clear and he could see the great castle appear before him.

At first he did not notice anything odd. But when he walked around and inside the castle he saw people fast asleep in the most extraordinary places and positions. The cooks slept in the kitchen beside a roaring fire. Knights were sleeping outside, leaning on their swords. A jester slept on the steps, a mandolin in his hands, and elegant ladies slumbered together on a long sofa. Even the animals — two parrots in a gilded cage, a cat and a puppy on a rug, a fly poised on the rim of a glass — were asleep. The prince called out, but no one stirred. He tapped someone on the shoulder, but there was no change.

The silence made the prince shudder. It was eerie. He did not know what to think. But he was brave and continued to explore.





Before long he entered the princess's chamber. Lying peacefully on a magnificent bed, fully clothed, was the most beautiful girl the prince had ever seen. He could not take his eyes from her lovely face. If only he could wake her! He approached her. The nearer he got, the more beautiful she looked. Gently, he leaned over and brushed her forehead with a tender kiss. To his surprise, she opened her eyes, smiled, and threw her arms around his neck.

"Oh," she murmured, "It's been ever so long, my prince!" They both knew, from that moment on, they would never be happy apart.

All the people in the palace, all the animals and the plants, awakened as soon as the princess spoke her first words. Everyone immediately rushed to the princess's bedroom. They were relieved to see her rosycheeked and healthy, embracing a handsome prince. The twelfth fairy had been successful after all!











With everyone looking on, the handsome prince asked the beautiful princess to marry him. Without hesitation she accepted, and her parents immediately gave their consent.

The loving couple were married a few days later, in the most splendid ceremony anyone could remember. The newlyweds left soon afterwards for the prince's distant kingdom.

Within a few years, they had two children, a boy and a girl as beautiful, kind and generous as their parents.

Everything was wonderful, but unfortunately their lives were turned around when war came to the kingdom. The prince left with his soldiers, leaving his family in the care of his mother, the queen.

Soon after, however, splendid news came: the war was over and the prince would be returning shortly. Hugging her children with all her might, the princess waited for his return.

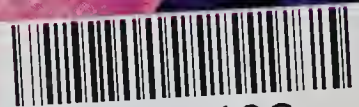
When the family was together again, they lived happily for the rest of their days.





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